

## The Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 9, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year B: 1 John 4:7–21; Psalm 33:1–8\*; John 13:34; John 15:12–17

Last Sunday, we heard words in John’s gospel from the supper before the Passover, not about a vineyard, an image for Israel in Isaiah and Jeremiah,<sup>1</sup> but about a grapevine. Jesus said to his companions, “I am the vine, you are the branches.”<sup>2</sup> Today’s gospel continues his teaching with words about the relationship of believers to him and words about how believers’ relationships with each other are enabled by him.

Before these words are spoken, his companions have heard him say, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>3</sup> And later, but before today’s lesson, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”<sup>4</sup>

For many years, I have followed the scripture [blog](#) of the Reverend Dr. Mark Davis, pastor of St. Mark Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California. In his comments on today’s gospel lesson, he draws our attention to how the Greek conjunction, *hina*, is translated. It can mean “that”, or it can mean “in order that.”

The translation of the first verse of today’s appointed lesson from the Revised Standard Version is “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>5</sup> This phrasing dates to the King James Version of the Bible. However, we understand it differently if it reads,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 5:17; Jeremiah 12:10.

<sup>2</sup> John 15:5a.

<sup>3</sup> John 13:35 (NRSV).

<sup>4</sup> John 14:23 (NRSV).

<sup>5</sup> John 15:12.

“This is my command, in order that you may love one another just as I have loved you.”<sup>6</sup>

The appointed passage for the Revised Common Lectionary begins with verse 9. So, Dr. Davis’ begins, “Just as the Father loved me, so also I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. These things I have spoken to you in order that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be fulfilled. This is my command, in order that you may love one another just as I loved you. Greater love than this nobody has, that one would lay down his psyche”—life—“for his friends.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus Christ has a purpose in being in a relationship with you and me. By remaining, abiding in Jesus, you and I are enabled to begin to learn to love him as he loves us and to begin to learn to share in the joy of being loved by him and loving others.

Joy is a value in Luke and in John. It gets one mention in Mark, six in Matthew. It’s on my list of things I want to look at more carefully.

I don’t remember what I paid for my first student subscription to *The New Yorker* in the fall of 1972—perhaps two or three dollars. But I do remember when I did not renew my subscription. It was in the fall of 1981, during my second year in seminary. I hadn’t read Pauline Kael’s review of *Chariots of Fire* before I saw the movie. I had been reading her for years. She was a clever writer, but religious belief had no place in her world view. I had had enough of her sarcasm about what is good in this world when she wrote sarcastically, condescendingly about the story the film told. One of the lines in the movie spoken by Eric Liddell, I remember well. The character says, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made

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<sup>6</sup> <https://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2015/05/in-order-that-you-love.html>, (accessed 8 May 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.”<sup>8</sup> No life is without its challenges, burdens, or brushes with evil. God made all of us for a purpose.

Yesterday’s *Wall Street Journal*’s had an essay on Rabbi Abraham Joseph Heschel. He was among the very few European Jewish scholars for whom it was possible to obtain visas to the United States as the Second World War began. He died in 1972. He was an early and strong supporter of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement. He marched with Dr. King in Selma.<sup>9</sup> His book *The Prophets* was required reading when I was in seminary.<sup>10</sup>

The article was called “What We’ve Lost in Rejecting the Sabbath,” its subtitle, “Setting aside one day a week for rest and prayer used to be an American tradition. In an age of constant activity, we need it more than ever.”<sup>11</sup> Heschel drew a distinction between the “realm of space”—when we work, study, whatever—and the “realm of time.” In the realm of time, “the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord.”<sup>12</sup> Personal relationships of any kind need space and time, especially our relationship with God and God’s many children. I treasure in Luke that two sons for God are named Jesus and Adam.<sup>13</sup>

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.quotes.net/mquote/16621>, (accessed 9 May 2021).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1963-rabbi-abraham-joshua-heschel-religion-and-race/>, (accessed 9 May 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, Harper Torchbook, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969),

<sup>11</sup> Sohrab Amari, “What We’ve Lost in Rejecting the Sabbath: Setting aside one day a week for rest and prayer used to be an American tradition,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 8, 2021, ([https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-weve-lost-in-rejecting-the-sabbath-11620399624?mod=searchresults\\_pos1&page=1](https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-weve-lost-in-rejecting-the-sabbath-11620399624?mod=searchresults_pos1&page=1)).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 1:35; 3:38.